



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

August 16, 2011

I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Don Beasley, Chairman, at 4:00 p.m., on Tuesday, August 16, 2011. The meeting was held at the National WWII Museum, 945 Magazine Street, New Orleans. The pledge of allegiance was said in unison, followed by prayer from Mrs. Wilkewitz. Roll call was conducted by the Chairman. A quorum was present.

Present:

Don Beasley, Charles Huggins, Russell Henry, Carroll Knott, Sulanda Lonnette, Richard Garner, Lee Richard, and Precilla Wilkewitz.

Absent: John Abshire

LDVA STAFF: Lane Carson, Secretary; David LaCerte, Deputy Secretary; Robin Keller, Press Secretary; Elmo Peters, Regional Manager, New Orleans Claims Office; and Charmagne Scott, Administrative Assistant.

GUESTS: Mr. William Detweiler, PNC, The American Legion (Museum Representative); Ms. Connie Fauver, VFW Department Headquarters; Mrs. Betty Garner, Mrs. Mary Henry, Mrs. Dianne Knott, and Mr. Mike McNaughton

On behalf of the National WWII Museum staff, Mr. Detweiler welcomed and expressed appreciation to the Commissioners for the opportunity to host their meeting.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the March 1, 2011, meeting had previously been distributed to the Commissioners for review. It was motioned by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

II. Division Reports

Before the reports were given, Secretary Carson announced that Walter Mlynarski had transferred to the New Orleans Claims Office. The Veterans Outreach Director position is currently vacant, but Secretary Carson has asked Mr. McNaughton (previous incumbent) to return to LDVA.

Note: The following reports (Fiscal, Human Resources, State Veterans Homes, and State Cemeteries) were made via teleconference by Stephanie Wade, Chief Fiscal Officer; Debbie Smith, Human Resources Director; Kevin Butler, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; and Thomas Burbank, Undersecretary; respectively.

Fiscal. Ms. Wade reviewed the handout of the FY 2010-2011 closeout budget for the LDVA programs and the Veterans Homes (ending June 30, 2011). The percentage of budget expended was 98.1%, with a remaining budget of 1.9%. Ms. Wade noted that most of the remaining funds were self-generated and federal funds; there were very little state funds to be returned to the state.

Human Resources. On the Full Time Employees Personnel Status Report, Ms. Smith noted two vacancies, both Horticultural Attendant positions at the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery, as of August 8, 2011. She also mentioned the Veterans Homes were doing well with filling vacancies and there has been a decrease in turnovers.

It was motioned by Mr. Richard, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to approve the Fiscal and Human Resources reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

State Veterans Homes. Mr. Butler briefed on the following new developments within the State Veterans Homes System since his last report given at the March 1, 2011, meeting.

- All five homes are 94.8% occupied collectively, representing an increase in census over the last quarter.
- Applications are now being accepted for the Liberty Hill apartments on the grounds of the Jackson Home.
- The Monroe Home recently received a good rating on its VA survey; also, due to a decline in census, increased marketing efforts were done and resulted in an increase in admissions. The Bossier Home also received an excellent rating on recent surveys and VA visits.
- The acreage leveling project behind the Jennings Home is pending due to the Army Corps of Engineer having to do other projects; it is anticipated this project will be completed by the end of the year.
- The bathroom renovation project at the Reserve Home is now complete and all are back in full operation. Also, Dr. Paul Jones, Administrator, submitted his paperwork for retirement effective August 14, 2011. The position is currently being announced.

CENSUS STATS PER HOME (as of August 5, 2011)

Facility	Bed Capacity	Current Census	Available Beds
LWVH/Jackson	161	149	12
NELWVH/Monroe	156	146	6
SWLWVH/Jennings	156	146	10
NWLWVH/Bossier City	156	142	14
SELWVH/Reserve	156	149	7

It was motioned by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the State Veterans Homes report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

State Cemeteries. Mr. Burbank gave the following report on the Northwest (Caddo) and CENLA (Vernon) cemeteries:

- There have been 28 interments to date this fiscal year at the Northwest cemetery. Highway and interstate signage has been added on the perimeters of the cemetery for directional assistance.
- The construction phase of the Central Louisiana cemetery is now two-thirds complete; the anticipated end date is November 27, 2011. Final approval of the equipment list is expected soon. Dedication ceremonies are tentatively targeted for late January/early February 2012, and the official date for operations is anticipated in February 2012.

It was motioned by Mr. Richard, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Troops to Teachers. A handout was submitted for the Commissioners' review of the program's accomplishments during April 1-June 30, 2011. The most notable item was the hiring of four teachers in the following school districts: Richland, Caddo, Orleans, and Lafayette. Continued marketing efforts and military community interaction are planned to increase knowledge and promote the advantages of the program.

It was motioned by Ms. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the Troops to Teachers report as submitted. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Military Family Assistance Fund (MFAF). A handout of the fund balance, donations, and expenditures for Fiscal Year 2010-2011, was submitted for review.

Starting Balance (July 1, 2010)	\$461,083.95
Donations	\$146,480.23
Expenditures	\$137,034.60
Fund Balance (as of July 28, 2011)	\$470,529.58

It was motioned by Ms. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Richard, to approve the MFAF report as submitted. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Public Relations/Outreach. Ms. Keller briefed on the latest PR/Outreach events:

- Handouts of new marketing materials were provided to the Commissioners, which included: LDVA and Veterans Homes table top displays; LDVA and MFA Fund banner stands; LAVETBIZ booklet; Veterans Homes and MFA Fund brochures; and Liberty Hill fliers. These materials will be on display and available at events where LDVA has a presence (e.g., job fairs, medals events, Yellow Ribbon ceremonies, etc.). A banner is also on display at the Central LA (CENLA) Veterans Cemetery site to address questions regarding the opening of this facility.
- In the area of Public Relations, regular updates on the construction status of the CENLA Cemetery are being forwarded to the local media (print, radio, Fort Polk publications). The "Support our Veterans" license plate continues to be promoted through veterans' service organizations (VSO) publications, fliers, and quarterly statewide releases. The Liberty Hill apartments are also being promoted via VSO publications and at local hospitals.
- The State Benefits booklets are being updated and expected to be available next month. The LDVA website is also being updated with a new design and more interactive features.
- The Women Veterans Conference is still in the planning stages. Research is currently being done by a student intern on what to offer at the conference in an effort to increase attendance.

It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Richard, to approve the PR/Outreach report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Claims Office Update. Mr. Peters reviewed a handout provided to the Commissioners showing statistical information on ratings and decisions reviewed, hearings, processing of award letters, phone calls/office visitors, and papers filed by the staff. The figures showed a continual increase from FY 2007-2008 to FY 2009-2010. Mr. Peters also briefed on two new VA programs: (1) Benefit Delivery at Discharge (BDD) will allow service members who are 60-180 days away from separation to submit a claim so that their benefits will be waiting when they are separated; and (2) Quick Start will allow service members with less than 60 days remaining to submit claims while still in service.

It was motioned by Ms. Wilkewitz, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to approve the Claims Office report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

IV. Date of Next Meeting

Two dates—November 8 or November 15—and a location—Louisiana War Veterans Home/Jackson—were suggested for the next meeting. Notices will be sent to the Commissioners via email once the date and location are finalized.

V. Other Matters

VSO State Convention Reports

- Mr. Henry reported the American Legion convention was held in Alexandria the second weekend in June. The national convention will be held in Minneapolis on August 26-September 1.
- Mr. Knott reported the VFW convention was held on June 24-26. Fred Wesley was elected the new commander. The national convention will be held in San Antonio on August 26-September 1 (same dates as the American Legion).
- Mr. Garner reported the MOPH convention was held on June 17-18 in Baton Rouge.

Ms. Wilkewitz reported on her attendance at the 2011 National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators (NASWVC) Conference held in Madison, Wisconsin on May 16-18. The conference was very successful, with 23 states representing. One of the goals of the NASWVC is making sure all states have an appointed State Women Veterans Coordinator.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, the meeting adjourned at 5:21p.m.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Lane A. Carson, Secretary

11/10/2011

Date of Approval

Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott, AA6. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes.